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FOR EAP/MLS (SCHEIBE)

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SUBJECT: VIETNAM COOL TO MALAYSIAN PROPOSAL FOR ASEAN FM MEETING ON  
BURMA

REF: STATE 83598

¶1. (SBU) On August 14, Acting PolCouns met with the Director of the MFA ASEAN Department's Political and Security Division, Duong Tri Hien, to reiterate our strong opposition to the August 11 conviction of Aung San Suu Kyi and to urge Vietnam to support a Malaysian proposal to convene an urgent meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers. Per reftel, APol/C encouraged ASEAN to speak with one voice in condemning ASSK's continued detention. The United States, he said, remained open to enlarging its relationship with Burma, as Secretary Clinton had said in Phuket, but ASSK's show trial and conviction had made this more difficult. Releasing ASSK and other political prisoners would be an extremely well-received first step, he said, adding that he hoped that Vietnam would make use of its special relationship with Burma to convey the message. Finally, APol/C urged Vietnam to view Burma through an ASEAN lens, noting that the United States was committed to engaging ASEAN much more robustly, but that Burma's continued intransigence remained an obstacle.

¶2. (SBU) Hien responded that the Malaysian proposal would be discussed when senior officials met in Jakarta next week, and that Vietnam would "carefully consider" it. At the same time, Hien voiced skepticism that an emergency foreign ministers meeting on Burma would go forward. As a technical matter, it would be difficult to arrange a meeting at this level and on short notice. Substantively, Hien said that Vietnam was not persuaded that a meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers would be constructive, since it would likely not lead to anything different than what was already said in Phuket. Turning to the Aung San Suu Kyi trial, Hien asserted that the Burmese authorities had demonstrated some flexibility in lessening her sentence, though when pressed, he conceded that this was political theater and that the verdict had been preordained.

MICHALAK